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RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
RUEAORC/US CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000267

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TAGS: [ETRD](#) [ETTC](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AJ](#)

SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN: AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES STRONG RELATIONS
AND REFORMS WITH NEW CUSTOMS CHIEF ALIYEV

REF: (A) BAKU 217 (B) BAKU 184

Classified By: Ambassador Reno L. Harnish III, Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: In his introductory call on new Chairman of the State Customs Committee Aydin Aliyev, Ambassador Harnish pressed for details of the agency's future plans and possible internal reforms. Aliyev extolled on the value of his recent trip to the U.S. and noted that he would like to create a law enforcement training center in Azerbaijan modeled on the Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers in the U.S. Ambassador noted that the U.S. was ready to sign the Customs Mutual Assistance Agreement as soon as the new U.S. Customs Commissioner was selected. Aliyev did not provide any details on his plans to reorganize or reform the Customs Committee. The Customs Committee under previous Chairman Heydarov was infamous for graft and corruption. The jury is still out on whether the new Customs chief will be able or willing to carry out reforms in his new office. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) On February 15, Ambassador Harnish made his introductory call on the new Chairman of the State Customs Committee, Aydin Aliyev. The Ambassador praised the Customs Committee's modernization while pressing for details of future plans and possible internal reforms. A healthy looking Aliyev discussed a wide range of topics with the Ambassador and noted the value of his recent trip to the U.S. as well as his previous trips. (NOTE: During Aliyev's December 2005 trip to the U.S. with EXBS, he and his traveling group were involved in a serious automobile accident. A local Embassy Baku employee was tragically killed in the accident and Aliyev sustained serious injuries, including a punctured lung.). Aliyev praised the close cooperation and relationship between the Customs Committee and the U.S. Customs Service. He expressed his wish that the cooperation continue and expand into different areas.

13. (SBU) During his December trip to the U.S., Aliyev visited a Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Georgia and remarked that such a facility would be useful in Azerbaijan. Aliyev noted that from previous trips he has taken real lessons back to Azerbaijan and implemented real reforms. He noted in particular Azerbaijan's export control system which is modeled after the similar system in the U.S. In addition, he told the Ambassador that Azerbaijan has purchased new equipment from SAIC to enhance border controls. He stressed that he remains extremely interested in modernizing the Customs service equipment and interdiction techniques. During the meeting Aliyev requested U.S. Customs trainers to

provide practical hands-on training in narcotics and other contraband interdiction at Azerbaijan,s airports. Aliyev also noted that the Customs Committee may purchase boats to enhance its maritime border capabilities.

14. (C) Ambassador Harnish expressed his commitment to continued strong relations between the Customs Committee and the U.S. Customs Service. He noted that the U.S. was ready to sign the Customs Mutual Assistance Agreement as soon as the new U.S. Customs Commissioner was selected. In addition, the new U.S. Customs Commissioner would come to Baku for the signing. Ambassador Harnish asked about the Custom Committee,s interest in intelligence sharing and training. Aliyev noted that Customs had such a division that liaised with other branches of the GOAJ. The Ambassador asked Aliyev point-blank about his intentions to reform the Customs Committee. Aliyev clearly did not want to answer the questions and quickly changed the subject away from the difficult subject. (COMMENT: The Customs Committee is widely regarded as one of the most corrupt parts of the government.)

15. (C) COMMENT: Aliyev told Ambassador Harnish that the Customs Committee endeavored to be transparent and that he did not want Customs officials abusing or behaving inappropriately. However, the Customs Committee under previous Chairman Heydarov was infamous for graft and corruption. The change in leadership at the Customs Committee, however, does not appears to have changed its modus operandi as business contacts tell the Embassy that customs officials at the airport are extorting even higher bribes than under the previous leadership.

16. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: The jury is still out on whether

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new Customs Chairman Aliyev is truly going to reform the corrupt Customs Committee. Some contacts note than Aliyev has been running the daily Customs Committee operations for the past five years as Heydarov took care of his personal business and political activities. New Customs Chairman Aliyev is a good interlocutor and has close contacts with several Embassy offices, especially EXBS. He appears to speak and understand some English and is relaxed discussing a wide range of issues. Maintaining positive and close relations with him and his agency may offer the opportunity to influence and promote meaningful internal reforms. END COMMENT.
HARNISH